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ABSTRACT

In 1989-90 Phi Delta Kappa conducted a national survey in approximately 100 communities in North America which involved 100 schools at each of the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. The data collected from the teacher survey were analyzed at Indiana State University. Approximately 9,259 teachers (2,078 elementary, 2,822 junior high, and 4,359 senior high school) reported strategies they regularly used with at-risk students. The questionnaire also collected information necessary to develop a profile of the typical teacher, i.e., white, female, 41 years of age, and holding a bachelor's degree. The average length of teaching experience reported by teachers was 16 years, with 6.5 years at their current school. Teachers were asked to indicate which of the 30 teaching strategies listed on the questionnaire they used and to rank the effectiveness of each strategy. Analyses of the responses indicated that eight strategies received a 75% or higher use at the elementary level, while five strategies received this level of use in the junior and senior high schools. All three school levels reflected 92% or above use of two strategies--notify parents and confer with parents. The eight strategies that appeared in the top 10 in terms of effectiveness for all three levels--though not necessarily in the same order of importance--were individualized instruction, special teachers, more time on basic skills, smaller classes, emphasize thinking skills, special education, special study skills, and emphasize coping skills. The strategies reported as the least effective included computerized instruction, before school programs, extra homework, restriction from sports, grade retention, elimination of art and music, and saying "leave at age 16." Three tables display the results of the analysis for all 30 strategies at each level. (BBM)

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**Title:**

# Thirty Teaching Strategies Used by Teachers of At-Risk Students

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# Thirty Teaching Strategies Used by Teachers of At-Risk Students

In 1989-90 Phi Delta Kappa conducted a national survey in approximately 100 communities in North America which involved 100 schools at each of the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. The data collected from the teacher survey was analyzed at Indiana State University by the authors. Approximately 9,259 teachers(2,078 elementary, 2,822 junior high, and 4,359 senior high school) reported strategies they regularly used with at-risk students. In addition the instrument collected information necessary to develop a profile of the typical teacher described as white, female, forty-one years of age, and holding a bachelor's degree. The average length of teaching experience reported by teachers was sixteen years, with six-and-a-half years at their current school.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis concerning teachers' responses to thirty teaching strategies revealed whether teachers used each strategy and how effective they felt each strategy was with at-risk students. Teachers responded "yes" or "no" to whether they used the 30 strategies listed and rated the effectiveness of each strategy on a four-point scale from "not very effective" to very effective. The effectiveness column reflects the combining of "very effective" and "effective" categories.

A rank ordering based on teachers' "yes" responses to their use of each strategy is provided for elementary teachers in Table 1, junior high teachers in Table 2, and senior high school teachers in Table 3. The responses for each school level were further divided into four groups according to the rankings on the basis of "yes" responses of 75 percent or more, 50 to 74 percent, 25 to 49 percent, and 24 percent or less. As can be seen in tables 1, 2, and 3 eight strategies at the elementary level received a 75 percent or higher use while five strategies received this level of response in the junior high and senior high schools.

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Tables 1, 2, and 3
About here

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Particularly noteworthy is that two response categories at all three school levels reflect 92 percent or above use: (a) notify parents and (b) confer with parents. These two categories ranked either one or two at all three school levels. The rated effectivenesss of these two categories, however, did not place them in the top ten strategies for the elementary teachers, and in places 10 for junior high and 9 for senior high. Elementary teachers may have responded less than the other two groups of teachers because of mandatory parent conferences for many elementary schools.

The top three strategies in terms of effectiveness at the elementary school level were individualizing instruction(95 percent), special teachers(92 percent), and more time on basic skills(91 percent). The strategies most effective at the junior high school were individualized instruction(89 percent), smaller classes(86 percent), and more time on basic skills(85 percent). At the senior high school level individualized instruction(90 percent), smaller classes(86 percent), and vocational courses(85 percent) were the top strategies in effectiveness.

Use of more time on the basic skills was reported at the three school levels(elementary 91 percent, junior high 82 percent, and senior high 82 percent) which supports the results of the interest generated in the media and from testing which helped to establish the need for more basic skills developement and performance among school children. Citizens generally feel that without improvement in the basic skills students are going nowhere in the academic arena or in the workforce. Furthermore being a productive citizen is tied to the acquirement of the basic skills.

In addition to the top three ranked strategies at the elementary level, five other strategies deserve attention such as emphasized thinking skills, and individualized instruction. Ranking elementary teachers' judgment of the top ten strategies in effectiveness provides the following list:

Individualized instruction(94 percent)
Special teachers(92 percent)
More time on basic skills(91 percent)
Smaller classes(89 percent)
Emphasize thinking skills(89 percent)
Special education(88 percent)
Special study skills(87 percent)
Emphasize coping skills(87 percent)
Teacher aides(85 percent)
Peer tutoring(84 percent)

At the junior high school, in addition to the five top strategies used, a list of the the top ten strategies based on judged effectiveness is as follows:

Individualized instruction(89 percent)
Smaller classes(86 percent)
More time on basic skills (85 percent)
Special education(85 percent)
Special teachers(85 percent)
Special study skills(83 percent)
Emphasize coping skills(82 percent)
Emphasize thinking skills(82 percent)
Vocational courses(80 percent)
Confer with parents(79 percent)

At the senior high school, in addition to the five top strategies used, a list of the top ten strategies based on judged effectiveness is:

Individualized instruction(90 percent)
Smaller classes(86 percent)
Vocational courses(86 percent)

More time on basic skills(85 percent)
Special education(82 percent)
Emphasize thinking skills(82 percent)
Special study skills(81 percent0
Special teachers(81 percent)
Confer with parents(81 percent)
Emphasize coping skills (81 percent)

It is interesting, in regard to teachers judgment concerning the effectiveness of strategies, that at all three school levels individualized instruction was at the top. Smaller classes was second at two levels and third at another. Several strategies occur on the top ten effective lists for the three levels such as emphasize thinking skills, emphasize coping skills, and special teachers. Keep in mind that educators have the option to use one or more of the strategies concurrently. Therefore, infomation from teachers concerning the clustering of these strategies is important because it probably suggests that they are using several of these strategies concurrently on a regular basis.

In general, the elementary teachers' percent ratings were higher than the junior or senior high teachers. This was especially true in the ratings involving effectiveness. Apparently, although not supported by hard data, the at-risk student at the elementary level is not so pronouncedly different from peers within the school. At the junior and senior high school the at-risk students become more segregated or recognized and their problems become more obvious and pronounced which creates more frustration for the teacher and in turn less positive responses from teachers.

If the ten most effective categories are reported, then the reader might also appreciate the reporting of the six categories for each school level judged least effective. The elementary teachers reported the following six least effective strategies:

Computerized instruction (56 percent)
Before school programs (46 percent)

Extra homework (30 percent)
Restrict from sports (26 percent)
Eliminate art and music (9 percent)
Say "leave at age 16" (5 percent)

The junior high teachers reported the following six least effective strategies:

Before school programs (48 percent)
Restrict from sports (42 percent)
Retain in grade (42 percent)
Extra homework (21 percent)
Say "leave at age 16" (15 percent)
Eliminate art and music (9 percent)

Finally, the senior high teachers reported the following six least effective strategies:

Computerized instruction (46 percent)
Retain in grade (46 percent)
Restrict from sports (41 percent)

Extra homework (27 percent)
Say "leave at age 16" (19 percent)
Eliminate art and music (9 percent)

To the credit of all teachers, the top and the bottom effectiveness rankings of strategies are very similar in nature, with the exception of some unique teaching level differences such as "vocational courses." "Vocational courses" rank in the bottom six of the elementary strategies and the top ten of senior high. It could be argued, however, that there are more similarities than differences at all three levels of school regarding perceived use and effectiveness of strategies.

Educators and computer salespersons who make predictions regarding computer education in the year 2000 might focus their attention on how "computer instruction" faired at the three school levels. Notice that the computer strategy made two of the least effective strategies lists. It is interesting to note that most professors who are predictiong the impact of computers in the twenty-first century only use a computer as a word processor in their office.

Attention should be given to any strategies that have low use by teachers and yet judged to have high effectiveness. Only two such strategies met these conditions and those were "restrict from sports" and "home tutoring". Home tutoring was veiwed as effective but was reported as low utilization. Many factors could account for the disparity in reporting use and effectiveness, but most likely would be that there are not sufficient funds to afford more home tutoring. The other strategy in question, "restrict from sports," arose only in the senior high level responses. Forty one percent of the senior high teachers felt that restricting from sports was effective, even though only four percent reported using the strategy. Sports are deemed very important by the administration and the community by senior high. Since the questionnaire to collect the data from teachers used a closed response, there is no data to suggest the thinking processes that accompanied the responses by the teachers.

It would take many more pages to cover all of the data and the subtle nuances that accompany the thirty strategies listed in this questionnaire. While the list does not exhaust all posssible strategies, it does offer some of the more common and more popular strategies now being employed by teachers. The reader can return to the tables and surely glean even more information of interest, and at the same time think of other strategies that should have been included. And ultimately, from this list, future researchers can add to or amend the strategies for more in-depth study of the concepts.

Table 1

Elementary School Teachers Responses to Effectiveness
Ranked by Use With Reported Effectiveness

| Percent Use | Strategies | Percent Effective |
|---|---|---|
| | 75 percent or more | |
| 97.7 | Confer with parents | 83.0 |
| 97.6 | Notify parents | 82.4 |
| 91.6 | More time on basic skills | 91.0 |
| 90.2 | Emphasize thinking skills | 88.6 |
| 89.2 | Individualize instruction | 94.4 |
| 87.2 | Special teacher | 92.0 |
| 78.8 | Special education | 88.3 |
| 75.2 | Emphasize coping skills | 86.8 |
| | 50 - 74 percent | |
| 74.7 | Flexible scheduling | 83.4 |
| 73.1 | Special study skills | 87.1 |
| 70.5 | Place in low group | 66.4 |
| 69.2 | Peer tutoring | 83.7 |
| 68.8 | Chapter I programs | 83.1 |
| 67.9 | Refer to psychologist | 75.5 |
| 60.5 | Teacher aids | 85.0 |
| 56.7 | Refer to social worker | 70.7 |
| 56.5 | Smaller classes | 89.4 |
| 56.3 | Summer school programs | 73.7 |
| | 25 - 49 percent | |
| 49.8 | Special textbooks | 72.3 |
| 46.6 | Retain in grade | 59.6 |
| 34.8 | Computerized classes | 56.5 |
| 28.8 | After school programs | 59.4 |
| 26.4 | Home tutoring | 68.9 |
| 25.6 | Extra homework | 30.3 |
| | Less than 25 person | |
| 21.3 | Alternative school | 65.3 |
| 18.8 | Vocational courses | 66.5 |
| 16.7 | Before school programs | 46.0 |
| 14.3 | Restrict from sports | 26.8 |
| 5.2 | Eliminate art and music | 9.5 |
| 3.3 | Say "leave at age 16" | 5.7 |

Table 2
Junior High School Teachers Response to Effectiveness
Ranked by Use With Reported Effectiveness

| Percent Use | Strategies | Percent Effective |
|---|---|---|
| | 75 percent or more | |
| 95.6 | Notify parents | 77.3 |
| 95.5 | Confer with parents | 79.0 |
| 83.9 | Emphasize thinking skills | 81.6 |
| 82.0 | More time on basic skills | 85.3 |
| 77.1 | Special education | 85.3 |
| | 50 - 74 percent | |
| 74.6 | Individualize instruction | 89.1 |
| 69.5 | Special study skills | 83.4 |
| 68.6 | Special teachers | 85.0 |
| 64.9 | Emphasize coping skills | 82.2 |
| 60.0 | Peer tutoring | 78.4 |
| 63.8 | Refer to psychologist | 71.9 |
| 57.1 | Refer to social worker | 71.1 |
| 56.1 | Summer school programs | 66.5 |
| 55.0 | Place in low group | 55.5 |
| | 25 - 49 present | |
| 47.9 | Chapter I program | 66.6 |
| 47.8 | After school programs | 65.0 |
| 47.6 | Smaller classes | 85.5 |
| 47.1 | Special books | 71.0 |
| 45.8 | Vocational courses | 79.7 |
| 44.5 | Teacher aids | 77.4 |
| 44.0 | Retain in grade | 42.1 |
| 43.4 | Flexible scheduling | 68.7 |
| 39.8 | Alternative schools | 70.3 |
| 39.1 | Restrict from sports | 42.3 |
| 25.1 | Before school programs | 48.3 |
| | Less than 25 percent | |
| 21.8 | Home tutoring | 60.1 |
| 21.2 | Computerized instruction | 49.6 |
| 18.6 | Extra homework | 21.0 |
| 10.3 | Say "leave at 16" | 15.3 |
| 5.5 | Eliminate art and music | 9.4 |

Table 3
Senior High School Teachers Responses to Effectiveness
Ranked by Use With Reported Effectiveness

| Percent Use | Strategies | Percent Effective |
|---|---|---|
| | 75 percent or more | |
| 93.9 | Notify parents | 78.7 |
| 92.3 | Confer with parents | 81.3 |
| 84.9 | Emphasize thinking skills | 81.6 |
| 82.2 | More time on basic skills | 85.3 |
| 76.8 | Individualize instruction | 90.0 |
| | 50 - 74 percent | |
| 67.7 | Special education | 82.1 |
| 66.6 | Vocational courses | 85.7 |
| 66.2 | Special study skills | 81.4 |
| 66.0 | Emphasize coping skills | 81.1 |
| 62.1 | Peer tutoring | 80.5 |
| 55.9 | Summer school programs | 71.7 |
| 55.8 | Special teachers | 81.3 |
| 54.5 | Refer to psychologist | 68.6 |
| 51.4 | Refer to social worker | 69.0 |
| | 25 - 49 percent | |
| 48.2 | Special textbooks | 70.4 |
| 47.7 | Place in low group | 50.1 |
| 46.3 | Smaller classes | 86.4 |
| 44.1 | After school programs | 62.4 |
| 43.5 | Teacher aids | 73.8 |
| 43.4 | Alternative school | 70.2 |
| 43.3 | Retain in grade | 46.9 |
| 39.9 | Chapter I program | 59.2 |
| 39.0 | Flexible scheduling | 62.1 |
| 25.5 | Before school programs | 47.1 |
| | Less than 25 percent | |
| 24.8 | Home tutoring | 61.1 |
| 18.9 | Computerized instruction | 46.8 |
| 24.0 | Extra homework | 27.5 |
| 13.1 | Say "leave at age 16" | 19.7 |
| 6.5 | Eliminate art and music | 9.3 |
| 4.7 | Restrict from sports | 41.5 |